



YZDRA

LOUIS V. LEDOUX



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Y Z D R A



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Y Z D R A

A Tragedy

BY

LOUIS V. LEDOUX

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TO
MY MOTHER

NOTE

THIS play is founded upon a story told in the *Secreta Secretorum*, a book which falsely purports to be Aristotle's manual of advice to Alexander.

An English version which dates from about 1400, gives the legend as follows :

Alexander, thynk of ye doynge of ye Quene of Inde whenne she sente to the, by cause to haue thy frendschipe, many presentes and noble gyftes amonge ye whilke a full fair mayden was sent to the that of her childhood drank and was norschyd with venyms yn-so-mekyl that her kynde was turned to ye kynde of serpentys. . . . And certainly, but thou hadde ben warnyd by me thereof, thy seluyn hadde takyn deed, thurgh ye hete of fleschly kennynge with here.¹

¹ For any who may be curious in the matter an account of the origin and literary fortunes of this story is given at the close of the volume.

CHARACTERS

Indians:

POROS *Emperor of that portion
of India now known
as the Central Punjab.*

THE PRINCE *His son.*

A BRAHMAN.

RAJAH OF ABHISARA.

HALF-WITTED BOY, who serves as a JESTER.

MESSENGERS.

YZDRA'S NURSE.

YZDRA *Daughter of Poros.*

Greeks:

HEPHÆSTION *Alexander's favourite
General.*

PROTEAS *A follower of the camp.*

A PAGE.

A SLAVE.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT.

Time: 326 B.C.

The action takes place in various parts of India.

ACT I

YZDRA

ACT I

SCENE I

THE THRONE-ROOM IN THE PALACE OF POROS

The PRINCE and the RAJAH are playing at dice; others are watching the game and lounging about the room. Some lean over the players in excitement. The PRINCE rises angrily.

PRINCE. I play no more! The time is evil-starred,
And dice have been the bondage of my house.
I play no more.

RAJ. My Lord, the luck may change.

PRINCE. Again I say the time is evil-starred.
Last night portentous omens broke my rest;
A wailing jackal would not let me sleep;

And once I rose from hidden dreams to see
If yet the golden car of Surya climbed
The East, when lo ! a raven, croaking, passed.
I know not what may hap, but this I know, —
Some fate impendeth in the womb of time,
Some evil fate, with darkness fraught and doom,
Whose shadow now above our royal halls
Hangs cloud-like, with its lightnings still in leash ;
But where or how or when the bolt may fall
I cannot tell.

RAJ. When lightning strikes, 'tis said
To choose the tallest trees.

PRINCE. For this I fear
The gods have sent misfortune's mandate stern
To me, or to my Sire, whose royal head
O'ertops our empire in its sovereignty.

RAJ. Perchance a war with Taxiles; per-
 chance
This Grecian Alexander who has come
Through Persia conquering.

PRINCE.

Perchance 'tis he.

The Greeks, indeed, draw near.

(Enter an aged BRAHMAN with two or three disciples following.)

To you I bow,

Most holy Sage. Your blessing now I crave.

(The BRAHMAN gives his blessing.)

We wait the King.

BRAH.

I join his council here

And speak to them of oracles fulfilled.

RAJ. My Lord, the King is even now at hand.

(The sound of trumpets is heard and the KING enters in state with the tributary kings who have a row of thrones on the left and lower down than that of POROS; behind each is an ensign-bearer. Then follow the counsellors, bow-bearers, javelin-bearers, etc. POROS ascends an ivory throne, the arms of which are fashioned as elephants with jewelled eyes. Behind is a canopy of peacock plumes.

The PRINCE goes to a throne on the right, opposite the tributary kings. All bow low while POROS ascends.)

PRINCE. All hail the warlike Poros!

ALL. Hail! All-hail!

(POROS motions the BRAHMAN to an empty seat beside the PRINCE and close to the throne, and, as he approaches it, stands to receive the benediction of Holy Water, the vessel containing which is handed up by one of the disciples. During the ceremony all bow low as before. Then, at a sign from one of the officials, the trumpet sounds three times. The KING rises.)

POR. Be welcome here, ye tributary Kings,
Who, arch-like, prop our dome of sovereignty;
We bid you welcome here as counsellors;
For oft while prudence searches devious ways,
A hero grasps with tiger-spring the prize;
While wisdom weighs the chances, valour acts;
And action turns the balances of Fate.

(The RAJAH of ABHÌSARA, who occupies the throne nearest to POROS, rises.)

RAJ. At your behest, dread Lord, once more
we come,
And own your lordship. Clouds are we, and you
The lambent sun before whose face we shine
With borrowed splendour.

POR. Most, indeed, to him
Is welcome given to whom it most is due; —
Our sagest counsellor, our noblest friend,
Who now from lonely meditation deigns
To come and medicine our ignorance
With wisdom's healing words. At his request
Ourself and each whose voice of right is heard
Are here assembled. All men know that he
Has store of precious counsels hoarded safe
Within his mind's rich casket. Jewels these,
That Life, the miser, yields alone to him
Who delves, unsatisfied with lesser good,
Through years of patient toil in wisdom's mines,

As he has done; for all his life has passed
In learning to distinguish good and ill,
The real and unreal. He has watched the stars,
And fathoming their courses learned of Brahm;
The sky has taught him and the populous earth
To see below the myriad forms of life
The broad foundation of eternal calm.
All this we know; yet still we lack the key
That shall unlock his wisdom's guarded wealth:
(*To the BRAHMAN.*)

We fain would learn the cause that brings us
here,

And wait your words; (*Turning to the others*)

but ere he speak, let all

Save those who share our counsels pass without.

(*Towards the close of the KING's speech a half-witted JESTER, clad in fantastic garb, has crept up to the throne and seated himself on the steps.*)

PRINCE. Do you share the King's counsel?

JESTER. Aye, forsooth. Am I not worthy?

PRINCE. Are you wiser than these? (*He motions toward those who are leaving.*)

JESTER. I know to remain sober.

PRINCE. Poor boy! No one offers you wine.

POR. Enough of this; peace, boy, peace.

(*POROS motions him to leave, but he steals in behind the others and overhears the conference.*)

Good sir, we wait to hear your wisdom speak,
This fool has much abused our clemency.

BRAH. The lotus flowers have spread upon the
streams,

The Pleiades have risen, wheeled and set
Some twenty seasons since the moonless night
When I, observing fixedly the stars,
Saw strange conjunctions spelling love and death,
And offered sacrifice, whose omen told
Of one new-born within the royal house
Who held the fate of empires in her hand.

PRINCE. Within the royal house?

RAJ. What maid was that?

BRAH. No more I learned ; but marked within
the West

A warlike planet flaming through the sky
That other stars grew pale and one went out,
But passing burned a moment lurid, red.

PRINCE. Could wisdom teach you what events
might cast
Such shadows on the calm blue eyes of night
That look upon the world ?

BRAH. In doubt I left
The deep seclusion of my forest life,
And took the long untrodden path which led
To where ye strove with unrealities.

RAJ. These unrealities seem real indeed,
To us who strive, and striving win or lose.
Your pardon, sir, I speak untutored words,
But from the heart.

BRAH. Like soldiers ye are pressed
By those around and see naught else ; but I,
The chief, observe the general battle's plan.

Ye strive for present vantage, I for good unseen.

PRINCE. Yet both perchance are naught.

Who knows?

POR. We wander from our purpose. Sir,
speak on.

BRAH. I moved through darkness onward, till
the dawn

Came stealing pallid up a cold grey East,

When met me runners telling how the Queen,

In dying, bore a maid of matchless form,

Divinely fashioned in her babyhood.

PRINCE. My hidden sister! I was then a
child,

But do remember dimly. Lives she yet?

POR. She lives, but I have never seen her face.

RAJ. But why is that?

POR. The gods demanded her
And I did yield, though much against my will.

BRAH. I offered sacrifice to read her fate,
But sudden blindness fell upon my sight;

In trance I stood and trancèd thus I spoke :

*“The gods have willed the tender maid should grow
In solitude, on poisons fed until
She gains their power, and this in time shall be.”*

RAJ. On poisons fed, to grow a poisonous thing!

PRINCE. On poisons! Sire, to rear a Princess
thus

Is horrible!

POR. Yet thus the gods decreed
She should be reared; and I obeyed their will.
On poisons she was fed.

RAJ. But for what end?

POR. The gods no reasons gave.

BRAH. At least not then,
For on my eyes the day returning rolled;
I knew no more. The King remembers well
My words oracular, but ye are strange
To these most sure events I now relate.

POR. Aye, well do I remember; and the babe
Was given in charge unto a skilful nurse,

By this same Brahman brought. They took her
hence,

And send report each year of how the maid,
To fuller stature grown, grows still more fair.

BRAH. As wise as fair, for I have taught her
much.

POR. At last her youth has bloomed to woman-
hood

More strangely beautiful than Love itself;
But so her life is with the poison charged
That death to man within her kisses lurks.

BRAH. The King speaks truth, her kiss is
present death;

She kills with sweetness like a poisoned flower.

PRINCE. This is an awful thing.

RAJ. And very strange.

PRINCE. I almost doubt its truth.

BRAH. Yet true it is.

RAJ. But have you any proof?

BRAH. We need no proof.

Who dares to doubt the very words of God?

POR. Not long ago she kissed a little child,
And some few hours thereafter, lo! it died.

RAJ. It might have had the fever. Ah! my
Lord,
Believe it not; it passes all belief.

BRAH. 'Tis impious to doubt!

POR. I am convinced.

RAJ. The fever was abroad; and thus it kills;
And yet this death confirms the oracle.

PRINCE. It must indeed be true.

POR. The truth is clear;
But what the further will of Siva plans
We now shall know; and whose the hapless lot
To cull this deadly flower of loveliness.

JESTER. (*Aside.*)

Oh, horrible! horrible! I pray Siva that she be
not preserved for me.

BRAH. Now come we to the point: three
nights ago

A dream disturbed my rest with presage dark,
That thus I do interpret; Persia's king,
The Grecian Alexander, eastward leads
His conquering armies. Men and power are his —
The Macedonian phalanx none can face;
Besides, the gods of Hellas grant him youth
With riper wisdom tempered; courage, skill,
And steadfast purpose. Now, let Poros send
To him the maid, enrobed in loveliness,
To offer friendship from our kingdom's chief,
And bind in marriage bonds himself to us.
Thus wisdom reaches where your valour fails;
The youth is amorous and frank withal,
And would accept such offers frankly made,
If backed with other gifts befitting kings;
But let him once her poisonous kisses taste
He dies a present death — most sure and swift.

POR. No need of this! I fear not any man;
Much less this Grecian. What have we to fear
Who lead against him fifty thousand men

With chariots and elephants ! Could he
With usèd, wayworn troops, afar from home,
Defeat our army and subdue ourself ?
'Twere madness thus to think ! I will not stoop
To crave alliance with this upstart youth,
Who smote the Medes in beds of perfumed ease,
And knows not how a warrior people fight.
We wait his coming. Should he dare to come
We meet him battling manlike, face to face.
We fear him not ; what says our valiant son ?

*(During this speech, the RAJAH and the tributary
kings have shown signs of approval. The PRINCE
has stood in deep thought.)*

RAJ. *(Aside.)* Though valorous in action,
slow to strike,
I fear his counsel.

PRINCE. *(Slowly and thoughtfully.)* Sire, your
words are just ;
Before your age, your wisdom and your throne
I bow submissive, yet my thought finds voice.

'Tis rashness more than bravery to fight
Unnecessary battles, risking thus,
Through pride, our subjects, wealth and empery;
And when the gods have shown in oracles —
By him made manifest who speaks their will —
The way to cope with present circumstance,
To choose another means were blasphemous
And fraught with swift disaster: gods avenge.

RAJ. My Liege, till now has Taxiles alone
With unsubmissive eyes beheld your reign;
Your only foe was he; your only dread;
And first to him must Alexander come
In marching eastward from the bounds of Ind.
Then, like an eagle when two lions fight,
Will you, unscathed, behold the bloody strife;
Until upon the victor, torn and weak,
You swoop with conquering pinions. Thus, my
Lord,

Your foes defeat each other; yours the spoils.

POR. Let Taxiles and Alexander fight!

into his capital and has formed an alliance with him for the purpose of conquering our kingdom. They are already collecting reinforcements, but the Grecian plans to rest his army for some weeks before starting.

BRAH. The gods are swift avengers.

PRINCE. Ah, the gods!

(*The RAJAH and the tributary kings look dum-founded.*)

RAJ. With Taxiles and Alexander both
We cannot cope.

POR. Our will is overruled
By Siva's will. The maiden shall be sent;
Let some provide a stately embassy
And fitting gifts. Abhîsara shall lead.
(*To the BRAHMAN.*) Do you instruct the
Princess in our will,
But let her not suspect her poisonous power.

(*He bows to the BRAHMAN and then, as the curtain falls, he goes out followed by his train.*)

SCENE II

A JASMINE BOWER UNDER A BLOSSOMING MANGO
TREE, OUTSIDE THE FOREST HOME OF
YZDRA. A PRACTICABLE DOOR ON THE
RIGHT. MOONLIGHT.

*(YZDRA discovered walking about and talking to
the NURSE, who sits at the base of the tree.)*

Yz. The night has laid once more its soothing
hand

Upon the eyes of Life. I sometimes dream
That love is like the moonlight after day —
A touch of peace; and then the lightning flash
Seems like to love, — this love I have not known
But fain would know. Ah me! My heart is sick
To-night. I long — and yet for what I long
I cannot tell.

(She moves about touching the flowers tenderly.)

The placid moonlight rests

Upon my jasmine flowers that gleam like stars ;
The timid fawns, the birds are all at peace,
Save only Bulbul, who with passionate heart
Still yearns, and yearning cries across the night
A sadness undefined that answers mine.
How beautiful is this our forest home,
Where every season brings some fresh delight !
And yet I find no more the old content
In birds and flowers, the moonlight and the dawn.

*(After a pause she goes over to the NURSE, kneels
down and starts to put her cheek against the NURSE'S.
The NURSE shrinks away and pushes her back.)*

My life is incomplete, it something lacks ;
Perchance this very love I dream about.
Would I be happy could I feel a kiss —
A warrior's kisses burning on my lips,
Strong hands about my breasts ; a man's strong
hands

And not like his — the only man I know ?
This Brahman makes me shudder, yet is kind.

NURSE. It may be even now a lover comes.

YZ. (*Playfully.*) Who seeks for me alone
throughout the world?

(*The NURSE makes an ill-tempered gesture of assent.*)

And Kama's shafts at last shall sting in me

No more a girl, but woman fully grown?

(*Enter the BRAHMAN. He hears the last lines.*)

BRAH. You dream of love; I love's fulfilment
bring.

(*He blesses her. The NURSE goes into the house.*)

YZ. With blessing, holy sage, your pardon give
That thus my inmost mind is disarrayed,
And all my heart disclosed to your ear.
Accept, although delayed, no less sincere
A welcome.

BRAH. Fair you seem to-night, and pure
As conquering souls that merge themselves in
Brahm.

'Tis right a maiden's heart should dream of love,
For so the gods have willed. These moonlit
flowers

With nature's incense fill the drowsy air;
'Twere hard, my child, to leave so sweet a spot.

Yz. Not hard for me! I full confession make,
Since you of half my counsel are aware;
This solitude and silence pall me quite;
A woman grown, I long for woman's life,
To see the ways of cities and the court,
To know the valiant princes of my race,
To smile above the tourney, choosing out
Some hero who will call me "Queen" and "Wife";
And after that to live as she of whom
Our ancient writings speak, whose love was
strong
To bend relentless Yama to its will,
And bring her lord from death's domain to life.
And then I long to do some worthy deed,
Or service to the State.

Yz. What Siva plans for me — that would I
do,

But well I know I was not made for this
Half-life, grown empty now of good or charm.
I long to fill the days, to do some deed,
And live in fame to future ages sung.

BRAH. You have been still a child, but now
you seem

A very woman, yea, a queen indeed.

Yz. Part girl, part woman, and part man I
think,

But all alive with youth and eagerness
To do and dare, to live, and greatly love.
Ah, life I crave with all its splendid chance,
Its days of action and its nights of love;
Not this poor shadow-world wherein I faint;
Yet know my strength.

BRAH. What further would you
ask

Or tell?

Yz. The nurse, who loved me well of old,
Has acted strangely toward me; now no more
She lets me nestle close, or kiss her cheek,
As was my wont. And once, not long ago —
It was the day I found the first spring rose —
There came a child, who, heeding not his way,
Had hither roamed. I took the baby up
And held it to my heart and kissed its lips,
When lo! my nurse came running in affright,
And snatched it from me; then, before the
 dusk,
A fearful sickness through its body stole;
And when the morning bloomed I found it dead.
But she avoids my questions, tells me naught.
(*Enter NURSE.*)

I ask you this: Why did she snatch it so?

BRAH. The fever kills thus swiftly oftentimes.

Yz. But why must I, a woman, live deprived
Of full-orbed life and love? You cage me here
By what authority? By whose design?

NURSE. This life she craves bears bitter fruit
for her.

BRAH. My Yzdra, now has come the time of
your

Releasement; now I lead you out toward life,
That seems so beautiful when seen afar —
Toward life and love.

Yz. Toward love? Oh tell me who!
What way of life is mine, what happy fate?

BRAH. With you I go to seek an emperor
Who rules o'er half the world — a valiant man
And young; to him would Poros give your hand,
A bond of firm alliance 'tween the states.
The rest I shall unfold within the house.

NURSE. (*Aside.*) A bond of death! I would
not have his lot.

Yz. (*Dreamily.*) An emperor, a valiant man,
and young!

(*Turning to him.*) How could a maiden reared in
forest ways

And ignorant of courts succeed to please

A king like him —

(*Murmuring.*) who rules o'er half the world?

BRAH. A woman's instinct teaches more than
courts.

Yz. Held in my hand the folded flowers unclose
Like woman's love from girlhood blossoming —
A presage this of future happiness.

BRAH. I follow you within.

Yz. Till then, farewell.

(*She bows for his blessing and then walks
toward the house.*)

BRAH. (*To NURSE.*) At court will Poros give
you recompense.

We shall not need you more.

Yz. Can she not come?

BRAH. You will not want her in the glad new
life.

Yz. Farewell, then, nurse, and give me joy at
last.

(She goes up to embrace her. The NURSE shoves her away.)

NURSE. Nay, touch me not.

(To the BRAHMAN.) I am well rid of this.

I go to seek the King and claim my wage.

YZ. You will not say "Farewell"?

(The NURSE goes off toward the forest. YZDRA looks sadly after her for a moment.)

What can it mean?

(Exit YZDRA into the house.)

BRAH. *(After a pause. Watching her.)* The ways of Fate are dark and hard to tread.

(Enter RAJAH.)

RAJ. I trust she will be ready by the morn.

BRAH. Aye! ready will she be, and glad she is
To learn of life.

RAJ. Poor child! She does not guess
Her power?

BRAH. No, and never shall guess till
The deed is done; for all the retinue,

Except ourselves, are ignorant as she.

RAJ. I bring the King's provision to her house.

BRAH. Much yet remains to do; I go within.

RAJ. She must be kept aloof from all her maids.

BRAH. I will arrange for that.

RAJ. They come. Farewell.

(Exeunt — the BRAHMAN into the house and the RAJAH toward the forest, in which torches are seen approaching. Attendants enter and carry equipments into the house. One of them leaves a spear beside the door. After some have come out again, enter YZDRA from the house. Voices are heard within.)

Yz. Oh, Life! Life! Life! An emperor and young;

A valiant man; and Persia's king as well.

Have dreams come true? My head is all awlirl.

But why have I been kept till now, so long

In solitude and ignorance? Why must they still

Slink sideways from my questions, tell me not

What most I seek to learn — why this has been ?

There is some mystery ; but now, ah, well !

It does not matter now, for life is mine.

But, soft ! for someone comes.

(Enter the JESTER from the forest.)

(He appears frightened and dishevelled, and looks about him half timorously, half vacantly.)

What wouldst thou here ?

JESTER. I followed on their track that I might
see

Them when they start.

Yz. Who start, and who art thou ?

JESTER. It has been very dark, and far it seems
From home. I wish that I were back again.

What noise is that ?

Yz. A beast that passed, no more.

JESTER. I wish that I were safely back again.

Yz. Whence didst thou come ?

JESTER. I know not who you are.

Yz. I am the Princess Yzdra ; who art thou ?

JESTER. The Princess Yzdra?

YZ. Nay, it is not strange
That thou hast never heard of me, for all
My life till now has passed in solitude —
Alone from infancy.

JESTER. (*Not quite understanding but remembering dimly.*) In solitude?

Alone? (*YZDRA moves toward him.*)

YZ. But tell me what thou seekest, then
The Brahman here will teach us of the way.

JESTER. The Brahman? You, alone?
(*She steps nearer to him and he shrinks away, but does not yet quite realize who she is.*)

YZ. I wonder why
This boy seems so afraid of me. Poor thing!
The Princess I; I would not hurt thee. Come.
(*He looks around as though wanting to run, and cowers back against the tree.*)

JESTER. The Princess! Off! Stand off!

YZ. Poor boy! Poor boy!

(As she moves still nearer to him, he seizes a stone as if to throw it at her.)

In truth I would not hurt thee. See how kind
I am. Thou seemest like a little child
Whom I could hold beside me; almost kiss
In pity.

(He starts to throw the stone; but seeing her step up to him, evidently unafraid, he hesitates.)

Why, what ails thee now? But see
How kind the hand that rests upon thy head.

JESTER. O gods! The poisoned kiss! The
poisoned kiss!

I would not die. 'Twas not for me they reared
You thus. Oh, touch me not!

(He cowers down at her feet. She places her hand gently on his head.)

The kiss! and death!

(He falls on the ground, sobbing convulsively.)

Yz. The kiss and death? The poisoned kiss?

'Twas not

For me they reared you thus? Oh, touch me not?
The kiss and death? The poisoned kiss? What
can

He mean? Poor boy, his wits are all distraught.

*(Moving from him, then, after a pause, looking
around at him.)*

Poor boy! *(She stands musing.)*

The poisoned kiss. The kiss and death.

*(She shakes her head; and then, suddenly be-
ginning to understand, a look of agony comes into
her face.)*

The child I kissed that died! My forest life!

The nurse that shrinks away! *(Wildly.)*

It cannot be.

(She staggers and supports herself against the tree.)

Why lead me out and show me aught of life,

If life is not for me?

(Thinking.) The poisoned kiss.

And death. He said what else? I must remem-
ber.

He said 'twas not for him. What then? For whom?

(Suddenly understanding it all.)

For Alexander death! And what for me?

I must learn more.

(As she staggers toward the JESTER, the BRAHMAN enters.)

Thou crawling snake! Thou mock
Of holiness! What good shall come to thee
From Alexander's death? my poisoned life?

BRAH. What meaneth this?

Yz. *(Trying to control herself.)* He told — he
told me all.

(The BRAHMAN makes a sudden movement toward the JESTER, and then, changing his mind, steps to the door and motions an attendant. He whispers to him and then the attendant leads out the JESTER.)

BRAH. *(Half to himself.)* No prattle more
from him.

Yz.

Thou takest life —

A human life against the Holy Law ?

BRAH. The Law must bend before necessity.

Yz. (*Seizing the spear and stepping towards him.*)

Then I take thine, thou jackal masked as man,
Thou grey hyena tricked in holy weeds ;
The blood of all the princes of my race
Comes battling upward round about my heart ;
Unsexed, I stand a hero of my house,
And claim the vengeance due, a coward's death.

(*She steps forward to strike him ; but he gazes at her unflinchingly and raises his hand, exercising his old authority over her.*)

BRAH. Turn not on me, my child, but pause
and think.

Yz. (*Wildly.*) But pause and think !

(*Cowed by his power over her and speaking very low.*)

Oh God ! I hate you so !

(*Aloud again.*)

'Tis time to strike, not think ; to strike with hate,
To trample out your life or spurn you hence.

BRAH. You go to Alexander ; should he die
His queen would hold dominion o'er the world.

YZ. O base, base, base as demons scorned by
Brahm !

I would not stoop to this — a coward's deed.

(She commences to break down under the strain.)

But tell me why my life is poisoned thus.

BRAH. Yzdra, you have but me to trust ; no
more

A child, but woman fully grown, I trust
Your womanhood, your blood, and tell you all.
Before your birth the gods decreed that you
Should live on poisons, gain this poisonous power,
But kept their reasons hid until but now,
When oracles revealed the State must fall,
The King, your father, lose his rule, his life,
Unless the Grecian army's march were stopped
By death to Alexander brought by you.

Yz. But what of me, who had my life to live —
My happy human life, my hope of love,
That you have baffled darkly from my birth?
I stand here impotent and gaze at life,
A nameless horror, loathèd by the world.
Give back the life you took away from me!

BRAH. Not loathèd by the world but named
of men
In bright emblazonry on honour's scroll,
As she who saved her country, saved her sire,
A maiden hero worthy of her race.

Yz. What owe I to a sire I never saw —
A sire who leagued with you to spoil my life?

BRAH. The gods have willed; the gods must
be obeyed.

Yz. I will not do it; could not stoop so low.

BRAH. (*Rising to his full dignity and threaten-*
ing her.)

The mandates of the gods must be obeyed;
If not, upon your soul the consequence.

YZ. It cannot be!

BRAH. Have you forgot so soon

The hour I told you of your father's will?

YZ. Oh, God! So sweet it was!

BRAH. You told me then

You longed to be of service to the State;

To do some mighty thing, some valiant deed;

And now you falter when the chance is come.

YZ. It was my dream of girlhood.

BRAH. Poros asks

His daughter to be worthy of her sire —

To give herself, as many men have given

Themselves, to save your land and ancient race.

YZ. I am a princess worthy of my line;

I would obey my sire, obey the gods,

Would serve the State and be a queen in all;

But not through baseness.

BRAH. This could not be base:

This deed the gods command will men revere

Until they set you with the gods themselves,

And build a shrine, and come in pilgrimage
To pray your aid whene'er your country needs.
Your speech is royal but you act the slave.

Yz. I could not do it.

BRAH. Yet you could not live
The life you dreamed, whichever course you chose.

*(The expression of hate comes back into her face.
She steps forward grasping the spear tightly, and
is about to strike, but pauses, again overawed by the
old authority.)*

In one your name will be forever praised,
As she who loved her country, served her gods;
The other course, if taken, brands your name
As one who, disobeying king and gods
Through woman's weakness, fell as falls a tree
By lightning shattered. Not alone this life
You lose; through bleak eternities of lives
The gods will hunt you, flying from their wrath —
A horror to yourself, a name of scorn.

Yz. It cannot be! It cannot, cannot be!

I could have been so happy living life,
A woman merely, in some humble lot;
A wife and mother, feeling tiny hands
Reached out for my protecting mother love;
Or just a careless girl as once I was
Among my jasmine bowers, with dreams for life.
So little would have made me happy; now —

BRAH. Aye, now you choose the brand of
infamy,

Or glory ever brightening, sung of men,
A name for poets' hearts to conjure with.

Yz. I could have been so happy, would have
asked

So little. Oh, to sink at once in Brahm,
Forgetting all the pain, the broken hope!
And yet I would find vengeance ere I die!

BRAH. Accept the way of duty marked divine.

Yz. It may be I shall try. Now leave me
here

Alone, yea, all alone. I cannot stand

It more. In pity for my weakness go.

It may be I shall do it. Go.

BRAH.

I go,

But charge you on your conscience, for your
weal,

To do the gods' high will, and save the State.

(She sinks down, hiding her face.)

Yz. Go! But go!

BRAH.

The gods decree that you

Shall save your people and your father. Now

I go. A little later you yourself

Will see where honour points. Till then farewell.

Yz. *(Rising.)* I shall do what I will; my life
is mine —

My little left of life — nor owe I aught

To country or to kin, to you or him,

But vengeance, vengeance, vengeance! Now
begone.

BRAH. Consent unto our plan or die to-
night.

Yz. Or die to-night !

BRAH. Aye, such is Poros' will.

You know the choice. Farewell.

Yz. Or death to-night !

End of Act I

ACT II

ACT II

ALEXANDER'S QUARTERS AT THE COURT OF TAXILES

(A pavilion tent. A practicable door on either side of the back, one leading to an inner pavilion and the other to the camp. Between them is a couch with steps leading up to it, and a low altar at one side. ALEXANDER, HEPHÆSTION and a PAGE discovered. ALEXANDER reclines on the couch. The PAGE sings.)

Is this but dream !

So close I seem

To hold

The lips, the breast

With passion pressed

Of old.

Again one kiss ! —
The moment's bliss
Is fled,
Like joy that flies
Ere yet surprise
Be dead.

ALEX. What, longing still for Macedon, my
Page !

Are not these Indian maidens fair enough ?

(*To* HEPHÆSTION.)

Perchance some languorous Persian lures his
thought

To swift Pinarus' stream where Persia fell :

The captive maids were fair.

HEPH. Indeed, my Lord,
We lost as many captives as we took ;
But we to women yielded, they to men ;
Full half of our army wear the Persian yoke.

ALEX. It is my plan to fuse at length in one
The many nations bowed beneath my rule ;

And intermarriage builds foundations firm
For future empire.

HEPH. Greece has owned your sway;
Athens and Sparta dread your god-sent power;
Cilicia, Egypt, Lydia, Scythia, Crete,
Are yours; the Medes and Persians call you Lord,
O son of Zeus! Great Asia's Emperor!

ALEX. Not yet is all of Asia in our hand,
Nor can it be until this Poros bends
His stubborn pride to sue our clemency
For life and realm; on him we march, and when
His head shall bow, a reed before the wind
Of our swift onslaught, when his armies fly
Like scattered sand before Sirocco's blast,
Then mayst thou call me "King"; for none but he
Is strong to stop our progress for a day.

HEPH. To Taxiles, our host, this day has come
A further reinforcement for our aid.

ALEX. His friendship cheers the troops.

HEPH. Would Poros now

Alliance make, as Taxiles has done,
It would be well.

ALEX. How seem the men to-day ?

HEPH. They talk no more of home and child
and wife,

But each of valour brags to new-found friends
And all seem well disposed for further wars.

ALEX. 'Tis well ! Ourselves will pass again from
tent

To tent, and cheer their reborn courage on
With speech of ancient sieges and the spoils ;
Of honour won and honour yet to gain.
How like you India ?

HEPH. Well indeed, my Liege ;
The Indian men are brave, the women fair ;
The land itself is rich in things of worth.
Could Aristotle, though he taught your youth,
Surpass these Brahman sages ?

ALEX. Much I doubt.
Who comes ?

HEPH. The motley minded Proteas.

(Enter PROTEAS with an air of great importance. He is dressed in the Persian fashion, and prostrates himself before ALEXANDER in the manner of the Persians.)

ALEX. Speak, Proteas, and tell us what god fills thy sails with the breath of his inspiration.

HEPH. Some idle god, I think.

PROT. Would the son of Ammon, most valiant and most mighty, deign in the magnificent lavishness of his kindness to hear tidings from me who prostrate myself dumb before his divinity?

ALEX. Now may Hermes aid thee! Speak on.

PROT. My Liege, there waits without, an embassy.

ALEX. I pray Zeus, the protector of strangers, to forgive thee their waiting. What is the appearance of this embassy, and from whom comes it?

PROT. It is, my Lord, an embassy of most

magnificent appearance, mounted upon elephants and shining with jewels. The leader is a man of comeliness, and beside him ride a maiden veiled and a Brahman old enough to be great-uncle to Kronos.

ALEX. But didst thou not learn from whom they come?

PROT. From one who calls himself an emperor — Poros by name.

(The manner of ALEXANDER suddenly changes, taking on the force and swiftness of a man of action and the dignity of an emperor.)

ALEX. *(To HEPHÆSTION.)* Bring in the embassy. We meet them here,
At once.

HEPH. *(Moving toward the door.)* The gods obey your will, my Liege.

(Enter the RAJAH, the BRAHMAN, etc.)

(While they make their obeisance, others spread costly gifts at the feet of ALEXANDER.)

ALEX. Accept our kingly welcome for yourselves

And him who sends you. For his gifts so rich,
And something strange unto our Grecian eyes,
We give their certain due, an Emperor's thanks.
In this with Poros we ourself will vie,
Returning friendship with munificence.

RAJ. To your dread feet, great Emperor, we
come

From Poros, who has filled our mouths with words
Of friendly greeting. These unworthy gifts
Are but the shadow of his good intent.

ALEX. What will has Poros other than to give?

RAJ. The honour of alliance. Furthermore,
He offers aid, should you such aid desire,
In following ever eastward conquest's path;
Safe conduct for your troops across his realm;
And you yourself he fain would make his guest.

ALEX. This offer, frankly made, we would accept
With equal frankness.

RAJ. One thing more, my Liege :
The King, with faith in your acceptance, charged
This Brahman, who is chief of all the realm
In wisdom and philosophy, with words
More fit for him to utter than for me.

ALEX. Philosophers and poets we have held
More worthy homage than are sceptred kings.
The diadem of thought upon his brow
Compels our reverence.

Be welcome here.

(The BRAHMAN motions an attendant, who goes to the door and ushers in YZDRA, veiled, and her maidens; then the BRAHMAN walks slowly over to YZDRA and lifts the veil. ALEXANDER starts in surprise and glances at HEPHÆSTION, who looks at him.)

ALEX. *(Aside to HEPHÆSTION.)* Think you,
could Phryne's self have been more fair ?

HEPH. Not Phryne, nor the wave-born
Cyprian.

BRAH. O son of Ammon, Poros purposing

To bind himself to you, yourself to him,
In bonds more lasting than a kingdom's troth,
Has bade me offer you for queen and wife
His only daughter, whom he loves right well —
The Princess Yzdra. He —

(During this speech ALEXANDER has shown increasing emotion, and now, without waiting for the BRAHMAN to finish, he interrupts, speaking rapidly. YZDRA has been looking toward the ground, but with the first lines of the following speech she looks up at him in surprise and from here on shows an ever increasing interest in him. At the close of the scene her voice and her manner indicate that she is deeply touched by his courtesy.)

ALEX. A woman's heart
Is gift more precious than a king can give.
It has not been my custom to extend
My conquests thus, or take unto myself
The maids that came within my power. The
 wife

And daughter of Darius both received
Full grace. And yet, because she is so fair,
And somewhat also for the kingdom's weal,
I would be glad of this; — if she were glad,
And came without coercion, moved by love.
What says the maiden?

BRAH. Sire, a name like yours
Wakes love in women's hearts.

ALEX. But what says she?

Yz. My father wills: I lie within your hand;
And yet an Indian Princess yields not thus
Her quick consent. The daughters of my house
Have pride of lineage and strength of will;
We choose from those who prove themselves for us.

ALEX. So proud and fair; you seem a queen in
all.

And yet you come not quite unwillingly
To crown your beauty with my name and realm?

Yz. Your Grecian Cupid shoots one single
shaft,

And Grecian bosoms yield them to the wound;
The Indian god of love has arrows five
With flowers barbed, and with each flying shaft
He seeks a separate sense. When all have flown,
And love gains access through the several wounds,
Then only, Indian women yield their hearts.

ALEX. I trust not to my armies or my state,
My kingly order or divine descent,
To storm this citadel of love, but trust
My manhood simply, and the strength I own.
Hephæstion, see our guests are well bestowed.

HEPH. I will, my Lord.

ALEX. (*To the RAJAH.*) This afternoon we hold
Some further conference, and then will ask
More fully of your country and your king,
Of whom the voice of rumour speaks afar.

(*To YZDRA.*) Of you, my Queen, I beg the cour-
tesy

Of taking these, my quarters, for your use.

Yz. I would not dispossess you.

BRAH. Not gently will it pass; for when the
troops

Are left without their king, each petty chief
Will seek supreme command; and Grecian blood,
By Grecian swords set free, will flow unstanchèd.

RAJ. Then Taxiles will turn upon his guests,
And each will murder each while we look on
And laugh, content.

BRAH. From far will we look on!
Once Alexander dead, our gracious host —
“Friend Taxiles” — from forcèd friendship lapsed
Would wreak his will.

RAJ. 'Twere well indeed to fly
And make what speed we can before the youth
Has quaffed the deadly sweetness of her lips;
For should suspicion pass but near our names,
An instant death would follow.

BRAH. When he dies
His army, mad with grief, will spend its hate
On Taxiles, and thus we catch two birds

Her mind at last is set to do the deed.

RAJ. In either case we gain our purpose.

BRAH. Yes.

(The RAJAH walks to the door and looks out.)

RAJ. They are not coming yet. I would we
knew

If love so long delays them on their way.

BRAH. When love points out the path, the
way grows long

In time, but short to sense.

RAJ. 'Twere well to know.

(Enter HEPHÆSTION.)

We wait the coming of the King, my
Lord.

HEPH. I also seek the King.

BRAH. They tarry long.

HEPH. But now I crossed a corner of the camp,
And all men spoke to me with one glad voice
Of how our Emperor and your fair Queen
Had gleamed an instant there on all men's sight.

It seems the King proclaimed a feast to-night
In honor of your embassy, and told
How not with pain across your stained spears
Would we your kingdom enter, but as guests,
With garlands decked and feasting by the way;
And when he showed in sign of peace and truth —
More sweet than peace herself — the matchless
maid,

A murmur spread among the host that soon
To general tumult rose in glad acclaim;
But they rode on and sought each other's eyes.

BRAH. Perchance they cannot pass athwart
the crowd.

HEPH. The soldiers throng about them praising both.

(A sound of shouting is heard in the distance.)

HEPHÆSTION *goes to the door and looks out.*

They come with half the army following.

(The sound of cheering gradually becomes more distinct; then enter ALEXANDER and YZDRA, the

latter flushed with excitement. The soldiers shout again and YZDRA goes to the door while ALEXANDER stands behind her looking at them. As she turns to come back toward the centre, she sees the BRAHMAN watching her, shudders, losing in a moment her joyousness; then tries to regain her composure. ALEXANDER greets the three men but is all the while watching YZDRA. He steps over to her as she stands glancing at the BRAHMAN and endeavouring to regain control of herself.)

ALEX. The audience I craved this afternoon
Must now be held, so many silken hours
Have slipped unfelt between our wayward fingers.

(YZDRA stands motionless. He glances at the three men who bow and go out.)

Queen, I claim the greeting promised by
Those wondrous eastern eyes that charmed my
sense.

You will not give me welcome?

Yz.

Welcome, King.

(Suddenly and rapidly.)

You must forgive me that I am o'ercome;
The sudden view of greatness opening out
Has filled my eyes with mist, my mind with
cloud;

And something too of girlhood's diffidence
Oppresses me. I am not very old,
Have not seen much of life and mighty kings.

ALEX. And yet you come not quite unwill-
ingly?

Yz. I hardly know as yet. Oh, give me time!

ALEX. Nay, time for what, my Queen?

Yz. In girlhood oft
I dreamed as maidens do of future love,
Of how a king would come and win my heart
By valour, courtesy, and kingly mien;
A mighty king he was, a noble man.

ALEX. A mighty king am I, perchance a man
Not all unworthy of a maiden's dream;
But now your beauty bows me, king and man,

To seek your throne of womanhood, and sue,
A captive, prostrate there, for life and love.

YZ. For life and love!

(*Aside.*) It cannot, cannot be!

(*Aloud.*) My life and love were yours before I
knew

Your name; before I found you aught but dream;
But now — oh, give me time! a little time
Before I wake. The dream must fade so soon.
Oh, give me time! (*After a pause.*)

I cannot dream again.

ALEX. Reality is fairer than your dream.

YZ. Reality

ALEX. Is here, my Queen, with us.

I would not push you forward to the leap,
Yet passion, rising in me, stronger grows,
And momentarily increasing makes my heart
Forget its calculating thought to build
A future empire's strength from your consent.
My manhood speaks to you with waking love; —

(YZDRA steps forward impulsively.)

You love me, then! Confess!

(The expression of pain comes into her face again.

She turns away.)

Yz

It cannot be.

ALEX. What cannot be?

Yz.

You do not understand.

ALEX. Love makes swift conquest of a soldier's
heart.

It eats like poison through me, blood and bone.

*(The shouting is heard again outside. ALEX-
ANDER hesitates a moment, looks at YZDRA, and
then goes to the door.)*

Yz. *(Aside.)* Like poison! Ah!

(Aloud.) You do not understand. It cannot be.

*(ALEXANDER turns with a gesture to YZDRA, then
raises the curtain and stands facing the troops
without.)*

*(The BRAHMAN enters unseen by ALEXANDER.
He stands looking at YZDRA and raises his hand*

in command, compelling her with his eyes. ALEXANDER motions the troops to be silent.)

ALEX. Beside the feast to-night we now proclaim

That games be held in honour of the Queen,
And many prizes, gold and things of worth,
Ourselves will give to those who most deserve.

(The soldiers cheer again. Exit BRAHMAN.)

But now let all disperse and rest awhile.

(Another cheer. He stands watching them as they go.)

The soldiers hail you as their queen and mine,
So yield you must; for we — we know not
how.

(YZDRA stands motionless, gazing straight ahead of her. She speaks mechanically without cadence in her voice.)

Yz. It may be I shall do it.

ALEX. Trust me now.

(YZDRA speaks still mechanically as though

forcing herself to speak, but there is some slight modulation in her voice, which trembles a little.)

Yz. Ah, King, I trust your love; I fain would
yield;

My every dream of girlhood changed to life
Before me stands. A king you are, a man
Of valour, courtesy and kingly mien
Beyond my thought.

ALEX. And yet you love me not?

(She turns toward him and speaks wildly, putting all her emotion into her voice, and desiring him to understand her, though realising that he cannot do so.)

Yz. I love, yea, love too much · 'tis love that
brings

Refusal to my lips. One last ideal

I clutch with straining hands. It cannot be.

I love you, love you, yet it cannot be.

ALEX. Nay, then it shall be!

(He steps forward toward her quickly, throws his

arms about her and stoops to kiss her. She pushes him back violently and speaks very wildly.)

Yz. Death! Your death and mine!

ALEX. What say you, Princess?

(Enter the BRAHMAN behind ALEXANDER. They do not see him.)

Yz. Death. Your death and mine.

It is too much. Oh gods, that this should be!

ALEX. What mean you?

(YZDRA sees the BRAHMAN and staggers toward ALEXANDER, falling to her knees beside him and reaching up for his hand.)

Yz. *(To the BRAHMAN.)* Go! In pity go!

(ALEXANDER draws away his hand and leaves her without support; she falls to the floor.)

Oh gods!

(ALEXANDER has followed the direction of YZDRA's look and now sees the BRAHMAN, on whom he turns fiercely.)

ALEX. What meaneth this? 'Tis thou who must explain.

BRAH. I know not what she means, but know
she loves,

And think the maiden's mind must be distraught
With sudden greatness and the love she owns,
With thought of you and your divinity.

ALEX. The truth! Be quick! The truth!

BRAH. I know no more.

Poor girl, her unused wits go wandering
O'ercome with passion and her sudden joy;
But I, who have some skill with soothing herbs,
Some knowledge of the mind, will soon restore
Her reason, make her yield such proofs of love
As oft a maid, though loving, long withholds.

ALEX. But now she spoke of death — her
death and mine.

BRAH. Those words meant naught; she will
unsay them soon.

Yz. That will I never do. The truth is mine
And honour, though I die in saving him.

(She rises to her full height and stands facing the

BRAHMAN, *her eyes flashing, her voice under control and her face showing perfect determination. For the first time, she has more force than he and he feels that he has lost his power over her. He moves involuntarily toward the door, but she steps in front of him, blocking the way.*)

He who has played so ruthlessly with lives
Now shifts to save his own. He dreads the change
To some despisèd shape, most like himself,
Some snake, or slinking jackal; yet his death
Could not requite me for the evil done,
For life and love, for hope and womanhood.
Some subtle torture of the frame and mind
Is best for thee. *(Turning to ALEXANDER.)*

My Liege, I tell you all.

(ALEXANDER steps toward the BRAHMAN.)

ALEX. What hast thou done?

(The BRAHMAN takes a dagger from his robes and strikes at ALEXANDER.)

BRAH.

I shall not die alone.

(YZDRA *springs forward and hits aside the BRAHMAN'S arm. The dagger falls and ALEXANDER puts his foot on it.*)

YZ. Nor I.

ALEX. Attend the Princess. Call the guards.

(*Enter HEPHÆSTION with five or six soldiers and the PAGE; then YZDRA'S women.*)

Hephæstion, guard this hoary demon well,
And put the others from the selfsame brood
In chains. Let all be gagged.

(*To the guards.*) And you, my friends,
Talk not unto the troops.

HEPH. Your will is law.

(*HEPHÆSTION and the soldiers lead out the BRAHMAN. The women are helping YZDRA toward the other door. The PAGE goes with the soldiers.*)

ALEX. When you have quite regained your
strength and calm,
I come to learn more fully of these things
That now are dark to me. Whate'er the truth

'Tis best that we should grace the games to-night
From joinèd thrones. The Brahman will be safe.
The secret must remain between ourselves.

(YZDRA goes out supported by the women. Two of the soldiers with the PAGE re-enter and stand at either side of the door by which they came in. ALEXANDER, noticing them, stands in thought for a moment and then takes a goblet from the steps of the couch.)

(To the PAGE.)

Some wine I pour to Ammon.

(The PAGE fills the goblet and then ALEXANDER goes up the steps till he stands above the altar, on which he sprinkles a little wine.)

Father, God,

Be now thine ear attuned to hear my prayer;
Let now thy heart, though filled with bliss eterne,
Remember once again my Mother's face,
Where white she lay in some dim woodland glade
And felt thy godhead stooping through the dusk

To crown her beauty. Now remember, King,
Thy joy, her sorrow, and the child she bore,
Who here with suppliant hands about thy knees
Lays claim with double right to aid divine.
Oh, Ammon, God and Father, hear my prayer!
Now guide and guard me; —

(Re-enter one of the women.)

Speak!

THE WOMAN.

The Princess comes.

(ALEXANDER motions the soldiers and PAGE to retire. Re-enter YZDRA. She speaks, at first, in a hard, restrained voice.)

YZ. 'Tis I who come to you.

ALEX.

The truth at once!

YZ. I must disclose a deed so vile, so base,
That demons thinking on it pale with fear —
A shame set burning on the front of Ind
To make her ways a by-word to the world,
And leave my name a thing obscene, abhorred,
For folk of after years to shudder at.

Yea I, whom but a moment since you loved,
And in a little moment more will hate,
When once you know my vileness, I who speak,
Who loved you, King; who love you, love you now,
From birth was dedicate to work your death,
By means most base, and loathsome.

ALEX. You I loved !

Yz. Aye, "loved." You will not love me any
more,

But soon will spurn me where I clasp your feet,
Myself, myself abhorring. Hear the tale :
This Brahman from my helpless infant years
Mixed poison with my food, until I grew,
Not knowing this myself, a poisoned thing,
That starved hyenas, did they know, would shun.
You have the truth.

ALEX. (*Starting back.*) No harpy is more
foul !

Yz. The gods themselves determined this
should be,

And spoke through him in trance their oracles,
Obeying which, he made me what I am.

ALEX. I hear the words but cannot take the
sense :

They have no meaning.

Yz. Hear me now, and heed.
My kiss is poison and my love is death.

ALEX. Your love is death ! 'Tis false ! That
cannot be !

Yz. No serpent is more deadly than my lips ;
He gave me poison till my life was charged
With horror, nameless, loathsome and accursed ;
Then he with Poros plotting, sent me here
To work your death.

ALEX. But you have saved my life.

Yz. I love you, King.

ALEX. I cannot think 'tis true
You have this power.

Yz. I killed a helpless child.
The poison takes a few short hours to work.

ALEX. This is too horrible.

Yz. And yet, 'tis true.

ALEX. The horror grapples strongly with my
love;

I love and loathe. Love's wound was swift and
deep.

Yz. You could not love a loathsome thing like
me.

ALEX. You saved my life. We must take
time for thought.

Ere night I will inform me of the truth

If this could be. It passes all belief.

Yz. Too true it is. I would it were not so.
My youth was passed alone with one old
nurse,

The Brahman's tool, who feared my deadly
touch;

There is no room for doubt, the Rajah knows.

ALEX. From him and from the Brahman will
I learn.

YZ. Think not too hardly of me. Speak
some word.

(ALEXANDER starts toward her impulsively and
then draws back, showing both love and aversion.)

ALEX. Love lingers yet, I cannot cast it
out

YZ. The fault was theirs alone, though mine
the doom.

When first I made discovery of my curse
They gave me choice of winning you or death, —
And then I loved you.

ALEX. Zeus! My love is strong;
My horror too. I must take time for thought.

(Enter the PAGE.)

PAGE. The soldiers seek your orders for the
games.

ALEX. I go with you at once. And you, my
Queen,

Farewell. I pray you grace our feast to-night;
Perchance ere then we may devise some plan,

And see more clearly things that now seem dark.
I humbly take my leave.

Yz. Farewell, my Lord.

(The PAGE raises the curtain. The soldiers cheer.)

SOME. Long life!

OTHERS. And love unto the King and Queen!

(YZDRA and ALEXANDER look at each other and then go out by separate doors. The stage is darkened for a moment.)

(When the stage again becomes visible, on the right is a platform bearing a table and two thrones; on the left a platform with a table and throne. On the tables are golden drinking cups. Below each platform is another table. SLAVES stand waiting to serve. A cheer is heard outside, then enters TAXILES preceded by a small bodyguard and followed by the chief men of the kingdom. TAXILES takes the throne on the left, the guards stand behind him and the others range themselves below. A louder and more prolonged cheer, followed by the

Macedonian battle-cry, is heard, and then ALEXANDER enters. Behind him come HEPHÆSTION, other Greek Generals, one Persian and PROTEAS. Then follow three of the Cavalry Companions as a guard. These are dressed in their own uniform, HEPHÆSTION wears Persian costume and the other Greek Generals are dressed in the Macedonian manner. ALEXANDER wears a combination of the Persian and Median royal costumes. He goes to the vacant throne which is the farther from the stage of the two. TAXILES rises and they exchange salutes. HEPHÆSTION seats himself on the steps just below ALEXANDER. PROTEAS after prostrating himself stands to one side and the Generals take seats at the lower table. While they are doing this ALEXANDER talks aside to HEPHÆSTION.

HEPH. What news, my Lord?

ALEX. The Queen has told me all.

HEPH. Some fearful thing?

ALEX. Most fearful and most strange.

She saves my life, disclosing treachery.

HEPH. Of whom?

ALEX. Of Poros and the Brahman both.

HEPH. The Rajah too?

ALEX. He also knows the plot.

I have learned all but will not tell you all.

The Princess comes to grace our festival,

But for the absent men make some excuse.

HEPH. [*Rising.*]

The Emperor bids me tell what all should know —

The reason why we lack to-night two guests,

Whose absence something mars our festival.

The Rajah of Abhîsara prepares

With necessary haste his messages,

Which tell of how the embassy has sped :

His presence much would grace our company,

His absence dulls our joy. The Brahman old,

O'erwearied with the burden of his years,

Which bore not easily the journey here,

Betakes himself to rest and lonely thought,

As is the custom with philosophers
Who find their pleasure in the mind, and scorn
Such joyous usages as games and feasts.
The Princess Yzdra comes, and having her,
Our lack of these, the absent guests, seems naught.

ALEX. Thee, worthy Proteas, we do appoint
For this one night to bear our cups to us,
And cheer our mood with talk. Not yet begins
The feast, nor shall begin until to us
The Princess Yzdra comes.

THE TROOPS. (*Outside.*) The Queen! The
Queen!

All hail the Princess Yzdra!

ALL. (*Within.*) Hail, all hail!

(*The PRINCESS enters.*)

(*She is pale but firm. ALEXANDER steps down
and leads her to the vacant throne. PROTEAS,
kneeling, hands her a golden cup.*)

ALEX. My Princess, now, with your most
gracious leave,

We will commence our feast and festival,
And honour you whose presence honours us.

(YZDRA bows and makes a gesture of assent.
HEPHÆSTION *motions the attendants. Some fill*
the winecups. Others bring in dishes. Musicians
enter with various Greek instruments and range
themselves on the steps of the couch at the rear of
the stage. After an instrumental prelude played
on the flutes, the PAGE who sang at the opening of
the present act sings:)

In all the world I see your face —
By night, by day, in every place;
Where Phœbus burns through western skies
I find the glory of your eyes,
And Cynthia, silver on the sea,
Your girlhood seems, at rest in me.

(A GREEK SLAVE GIRL sings the answering
stanza:)

And when my eyes are closed in sleep,
Your image safe within they keep;

In dreams I touch your lips, your hands,
And breathe the words love understands,
But waked from dreams I sigh alway
For you who miss me, night and day.

(Both together.)

Ah Love, as in the vacant sky
When night is past and dawn is nigh,
There lives alone one planet blue,
So all my Heaven has only you !
So all my Heaven has only you !

Yz. A sweet, sad song, O King.

ALEX. Love unfulfilled
Breeds strange illusions.

Yz. Yet the singer told
Of absence only; sadder songs would come
From one who sought the bourne where Life
meets Death,
And smiles to see its passion changed to peace
In vast annihilation; finding calm
Unending, timeless, senseless.

HEPH.

Passion's songs

Come undefeated, struggling through the void
From singers hushed in Hades; and in them
Has love its only immortality.

Yz. But see, some further pleasure comes to
us.

(Enter a HINDU DANCING GIRL.)

(She dances to the accompaniment of players. Throughout this scene, the feast is in progress. PROTEAS says nothing but has comic business such as stealing wines and food, and approaching the KING and YZDRA each time with a pronounced obeisance. He evidently is filled with a sense of the importance of his office and he orders about the servants with arrogance.)

HEPH. My Queen, how pleases you the
maiden's dance?

Yz. I like it well and would see more of them.

(Aside.) The music chimes a sadness like
my own.

ALEX. (*Aside.*) Be not so sad.

Yz. (*Aside.*) What help is there for us?

HEPH. The Queen, I trust, ere long will come
with us

To see our dancing girls in Macedon.

Yz. I would be glad of that.

HEPH. What have we here?

(*Enter a HINDU JUGGLER with his attendants.*)

(*While he is performing two or three of the famous Hindu tricks PROTEAS stands open-mouthed in amazement and forgets to fill the cups. After the first trick PROTEAS speaks but keeps his eyes upon the HINDU.*)

PROTEAS. My liege, I think he must be half
divine;

No mortal man could do such wondrous things.

HEPH. Amazement fills me.

ALEX. Yea, 'tis very strange.

(*During the second trick PROTEAS shows increasing fear, and at the close he starts to prostrate*

himself before the HINDU.)

Stand up. Stand up.

HEPH. This thing is wonderful.

ALEX. (*To YZDRA.*) Our Grecian wisdom
seems but poor indeed,

Beside your eastern magic.

HEPH. Socrates

For all his knowledge could not reach to this.

Yz. Our thought is old, yet stretches up-
ward still;

Onward and upward till it clasps the gods.

But all is impotent when sorrow comes;

It cannot free the heart where anguish dwells,

Or dry the smallest of a woman's tears.

ALEX. Yet courage often wins what thought
gives up,

And hews its way to sunlight from the dark.

Yz. (*Aside, touching her breast.*)

'Tis midnight here.

ALEX. I see a sluggish dawn.

(At the close of the third trick, the soldiers outside are heard.)

THE SOLDIERS: The games! Do not forget
the games! The games!

ALEX. Indeed, we had forgot. The soldiers
wait. *(Rising.)*

Do you lead on unto the games and soon
The Queen and I will follow; first we hold
Some further conference of private things.

*(TAXILES rising, bows to ALEXANDER and
YZDRA and goes out followed by his train, and then
by the Greeks. ALEXANDER and YZDRA alone
come down to the centre of the stage.)*

Yz. What have you done?

ALEX. I know the awful truth;
The oracle was clear, I must believe;
And he who voiced the god confirms it now;
There is no room for doubt.

Yz. Then none for hope.

(Looking up at him bravely.)

I know you cannot love me any more.

ALEX. I cannot choose but love in spite of
all.

Yz. It cannot be your love is like my own
That rends me, helpless, with its agony.

ALEX. But one poor way I see.

Yz. Oh, tell me that.

ALEX. A strange, sad way it is and leads to
death.

Yz. To death and not to love.

ALEX. To love fulfilled,
Then death.

Yz. Ah, love fulfilled is all I crave!
To cling unto your lips, then welcome death.
I love too much, for life beyond your arms
Has naught for me.

ALEX. And naught for me, O Queen.
This love is strong indeed, his arrows wound;
And I, the conqueror, who thought to rule,
Am bowed in vassalage; the world and life,

And let us live with lips that never meet,
But joinèd hearts and hands.

ALEX. That could not be.
Not till I drain the certainty of death
From their excess of sweetness do I live.

Yz. When passion cools with age we two will
go
Toward death together, happy in our love.

ALEX. That cannot, shall not be! Not Tan-
talus
Does madden so with thirst as I for you,
And not so heavy is the doom he bears
As this would be. Life has not aught for us
But love fulfilled.

Yz. (*With less assurance.*) I will not have it
so!

ALEX. (*Speaking in a tone of decision, and putting all the force of his character in the assertion.*) My love is stronger than the bonds of life.

Yz. (*Very wildly and with all possible intensity.*)

He loves as I! (*She springs toward him.*) I do
accept your love.

(ALEXANDER *steps toward her impulsively and then checks himself with a great effort.*)

ALEX. But one thing more I do before the
end:

I thirst for vengeance on the dastard king
Who planned this coward's trick, and poisoned
you.

Yz. (*Slowly and thoughtfully.*)
My people expiate my father's fault.
I grieve for them, but grieve not much for him
Who justly falls. He gave no love to me;
And yet the ending of my ancient race
Through me brings sorrow.

ALEX. Love forgotten seems.

Yz. Ah, no! A moment's grief and that is
all.

Be swift and sure; my father's host is strong.

ALEX. Or weak or strong, I shall defeat him
soon.

Then vengeance satisfied, world-empire won,

We drink our cup of passion, yield to Fate.

Yz. Ah! love is strong!

ALEX. I do not fear to die.

'Tis best to seek the shades with blazing course,

A star across the night; not slowly fade

When men have half forgot how once you shone.

Yz. Yea, that were good; to live one perfect
hour,

Then fall like stars while all men stand amazed.

ALEX. There seems no other way for you and
me.

Yz. What do you with the Brahman?

ALEX. He shall go

With ignominy heaped, and if he will

May tell his jackal king the lion comes.

To-morrow morn shall see our march begin.

YZ. Ah, Love, do swiftly this — your last
great deed —

And then we drain the cup, let come what will!

ALEX. It cannot come too soon.

THE SOLDIERS. The King! The King!

(Enter HEPHÆSTION.)

HEPH. The soldiers grow impatient.

ALEX. Now we come. *(Exeunt.)*

Curtain

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE I

A CORRIDOR IN THE PALACE OF POROS

(POROS *discovered*. *Enter* PRINCE.)

PRINCE. Again I greet you, Sire.

POR. Be welcome, son.

How fared you on your errand?

PRINCE. Well, my Lord;

If present plans should fail, and need there be,

You could command an army worthy you.

I found the separate chiefs each well disposed

With love and loyalty to serve your cause;

They all have raised their men and wait your
word.

POR. That news is good; should our first
arrow miss,

The bow is bent to send the second forth.

No news has reached me yet. I would we knew
What so delays the Brahman's messenger.

PRINCE. My mind forebodes some dire mis-
chance.

POR. And mine.

I never played this hypocritic game
With any zeal; a man should fight with arms.

PRINCE. The way we took was pointed by the
gods,
But still my mind keeps boding ill on ill.
There must be news ere long.

POR. My patience wanes.

PRINCE. What made you send the Princess
Yzdra's nurse
So hotly after her?

POR. How knew you that?

PRINCE. She passed me, speeding swiftly on
her way.

POR. 'Twas best the Princess should have
someone by

Who knew her fearful secret, and who could,
If need there were, sustain the Brahman's
plans.

She reared the girl and she is worthy trust.

But look, who comes ?

PRINCE. It is the Brahman, Sire.

POR. The Brahman !

PRINCE. Aye, all woe-begone and weak,
With clotted hair, his garments soiled and torn ;
He scarce can stand.

(Enter BRAHMAN.)

POR. What brings you in this plight ?

BRAH. To arms ! to arms ! there is no other
way.

POR. The King refused her then ?

BRAH. He learned our plot,
And pale with anger marches on you now.

PRINCE. How could he learn the plot ?

POR. No time for words !
Go you, send messengers to all the chiefs.

BRAH. The Princess learned by accident her
power,

And through a woman's weakness told the King.

POR. He did not doubt the truth ?

BRAH. How could he doubt ?

I said that fever might have killed the child ;

But she had told him of the oracle,

And none there is who disbelieves the gods.

POR. It was the truth that fever killed the
child.

PRINCE. And not the poison ?

POR. No, for I have learned

Its mother died of fever just before,

And that was why it wandered off alone.

Its death proved nothing.

PRINCE. Nor disproves it now ;

We need no proof beyond the oracle.

POR. We have not now the slightest trace of
proof ;

We know they gave her poisons, but know not

That she has gained their power.

BRAH.

If there is one

Who thinks the words I uttered in my trance

Were not directly spoken by the god,

Let him believe the Princess is the same

As other maidens are.

PRINCE.

None such there is;

We cannot doubt a dream or oracle.

POR. I cannot choose but doubt so strange a
thing;

But true, or false, it does not matter now;

The war is on our hands; the Grecian comes.

Where is Abhîsara?

BRAH.

Two nights ago

He left me while I slept and took away

The scant provisions we had gathered up.

PRINCE. It cannot be that he is traitorous!

POR. Go you and do our bidding; raise the
host.

Though all should traitors prove, ourself will fight

And be this Grecian's death, or die by him.

(*Exit* PRINCE.)

And you : our royal curse be on your head !

Our curse, and if it come, the country's doom !

No more will I be led from valour's course

To follow darkly twisting paths of stealth,

Or prop my kingdom on uncertain dreams

That make me scorn myself, and leaned on,
fail.

BRAH. My Lord —

POR. Nay, hear me speak.

When first I gave

Consent to yield the Princess to your will

My mind foreboded fearful things to come ;

But now I fight ! My own brave way is left.

BRAH. And I, with you, will face the Grecian
darts,

Inciting all to fight for king and gods.

My plan has failed, some demon thwarted us,

So now I aid your courage in the field.

I faint for lack of food.

POR.

Go you to rest,

And I will make provision for the war ;

Then later we will hear your tale rehearsed.

Curtain

SCENE II

YZDRA'S TENT IN ALEXANDER'S CAMP ON THE
WEST BANK OF THE HYDASPES

(It is the afternoon before the battle. YZDRA is discovered reclining on a couch; slaves are fanning her. Enter NURSE.)

NURSE. My Lotos Flower, your father bade
me take

His swiftest elephant to follow you,
Lest in this strange new world you feel the lack
Of me and my accustomed services.
I missed you many times but find at last.

(YZDRA rising furiously motions the slaves to leave. As they go, she stands looking at the NURSE, then breaks out in uncontrolled passion.)

Yz. Thou here! Thou dare to come and face
me now!

I know thee, what thou art, and scorn thy
wiles

Of unforgiven infamy.

NURSE. My child!

YZ. Nay, "child" not me! I know thee,
know myself —

The thing that thou hast made me. Ven-
geance waits.

NURSE. You mean my death!

YZ. Aye, death! Look not about;
Thou canst not fly, but when thou goest hence
'Twill be to death; with shame as dark as mine.

NURSE. The poisoned death? O God! Not
that! Not that!

*(YZDRA has been regaining control of herself
and speaks now less wildly.)*

YZ. That would be justice. Dost thou
tremble now
In pity of thyself, who pitied not
Thy foster-child?

NURSE. Oh, grant some other death
Less awful in itself, aught else but that!

Yz. (*She begins speaking with a start of surprise as the idea strikes her; and as she continues, speaking half to herself and thinking of ALEXANDER, her manner becomes gradually less hard and her passion subsides till at the close she speaks dreamily with nothing in her voice and eyes but her love for him.*)

It might be that the poison would not kill,
Despite the Brahman's wisdom. Gods, dear
gods,

How happy would we be if this were proved!
And we could live and love and rule the world,
Forgetting all this coil of hate and tears.

NURSE. It could not fail. Forgive. My
death is sure.

Yz. (*Pleading for some confirmation of her hope.*)

You know that death is sure?

NURSE. Forgive me! Spare!

Yz. (*Wildly again.*) Didst thou spare me?

Nay, then I make the test:

(*She springs toward her and then stops suddenly, a look of bewilderment on her face.*)

Yz. I cannot seem to do it.

NURSE. Spare me! Spare!

Yz. I could have done it once.

NURSE. Forgive me.

Yz. Yea,

I cannot help myself, for love has come
And tamed me from my wildness. Go in peace.
Yes, go! Since life is sweet, I give thee back
Thy few grey years, and suffer all myself.
Go quickly, though; it might be I should change.

(*The NURSE looks at her doubtfully for a moment and then hurries out. YZDRA throws herself exhausted on the couch.*)

(*After a pause.*)

She really seemed to love me years ago.

(After a shorter pause.)

I wonder if my garden looks the same,
And if those climbing roses reached the tree.
I wish that I had asked her.

(She calls.) Nurse! Oh, Nurse!

She is not there. I never shall forget
The garden, nor those childish dreams I dreamed
And told unto the roses.

(She goes to the door to look for the NURSE just as a slave ushers in HEPHÆSTION.)

HEPH. Greetings, Queen.

Yz. Be welcome, General.

HEPH. But why so sad?

Yz. I cannot quite forget my garden home,
Nor all the dreams I dreamed among the hills;
And sometimes in my sleep I seem to wake
And feel the flowers that I loved so well,
Unseen, but all about me, everywhere.
And sometimes, even when the King is by,
And speaks of love to me and I to him,

A sound or scent will bring my garden here;
Then all the past comes flooding to my eyes:
It is a part of me and must remain.
But this is naught to you. You bring me news?

HEPH. The usual news — that Alexander longs
To see you once again. He sent me here
To ask if he might come at once.

Yz. Ah, yes;
'Tis afternoon and every crawling hour
Since yestermorn when last I saw the King
Has stretched to double length its weariness.

HEPH. The King but now returnèd to the
camp.

Yz. How fared his scouting party?

HEPH. Well, I think.
Your father's host upon the other shore
Keeps close to camp, expecting us to wait
Until the flood abating lets them cross.
The King may come at once?

Yz. Yes, bid him come.

HEPH. My feet are shod with Hermes' sandals,
Queen,

To bear with swiftest speed your messages.

(Exit HEPHÆSTION.)

Yz. Yet once again he comes, and once again
My passion springs to meet him.

(She looks at herself in a burnished copper mirror.)

Fair I am :

That matters not — he could not love me more
If all the gods should with each other vie
To heap divine perfections on my head ;
He would not love me less, if beauty changed
To strange deformity.

(Enter ALEXANDER.)

Ah, Lover, King,

So long has absence seemed, so very long !

ALEXANDER. Yea, like eternity to souls un-
blessed.

Yz. But are you wholly mine ? When you are
here

I would not have you king or general,
Or aught I cannot share, but mine, and mine,
And mine alone — the well-loved lover only.

ALEX. All yours I am. The world outside is
like

Some dim, remembered dream when one awakes;
My life is yours, and soon — this night perhaps —
I die to hold you closely, mine indeed.

YZ. So soon!

ALEX. The battle will be joined to-
night.

YZ. Ah, do not risk the crossing!

ALEX. This one deed
To crown my life before the eyes of men
I do; and then at last, world-empire won,
I yield me to my passion, hold you close,
My own indeed; the world and life forgot
In love's full ecstasy of eyes and lips.
My love is strong and binds me more than Fate
To work its will.

Yz. The gods protect you, Love!
Do not neglect to send me messages
Of how the battle goes. Remember her
Who waits and watches through the lonely hours,
A prey to all the fears love conjures up.
And yet, I would some other course had led
To love fulfilled than this sad way we climb
Who mount upon the corpses of my kin
To victory. My father and my race,
Our ancient name, through me are doomed to
death.

ALEX. They fall, but love upon them stands
alone;
And love is all that counts; for love I give
My lordship of the world, and you your race.

Yz. I would not have you, Love, give up so
much.
Ah, yes, I would; and yet I can but doubt
When now you reach the two diverging ways;
One short but very sweet through love to death,

And one that leads through years of fame and
praise

To honoured age, if you would not prefer
To walk the longer path, and live your life.

I have had many thoughts these last few days :

It made me think to have the end so near.

ALEX. There is no choice but one — through
love to death.

Yz. Ah, yes, there is! The other path that
here

Seems dark and hard to tread, with naught beyond,
Would soon grow easy for your feet; and soon
You would look forward brightly, not look back,
Forgetting love. Then I, from some lone place,
Would see your glory in the blinding sun
And send my messengers to hear your voice
And tell me of your looks.

ALEX. I am resolved.

Yz. My love may not at last so fatal prove;
I sometimes hope again.

I tried before to tell you this, but still
Your passion like a torrent whirled me on,
And swept me from myself and blinded me.
I could not set my will opposed to yours;
I did not have the will; but now I have.

(YZDRA *bares her bosom, imploring the stroke.*)

ALEX. Nay, Love, put by that thought; we
two are strong

To face our destiny unfaltering;
I am resolved to make you all my own,
And ere to-morrow's stars I come to you
To call you "Bride", though Fate be there to
smite.

Yz. It shall not be! My love implores your
hate;

I clasp it to my breast. Oh, leave me now,
And let me take myself where nevermore
Your eyes shall fill with horror at my sight;
Or let me go and hide myself in death;
The grave alone can cover shame like mine.

ALEX. Come life, come death, our hearts are
joined for both ;

And love shall be fulfilled.

Yz. Then go, my King,
And certain victory attend your course ;
Then hide within my arms your sovereignty.

ALEX. I shall not fail. The troops are on
the march

And I, their leader, tarry here too long.

Love give me wings to win and come again !

Yz. Farewell, and may the gods fulfill my
prayers

And bring you swiftly back, victorious.

Curtain

SCENE III

OUTSIDE THE TENT OF POROS ON THE EAST BANK
OF THE HYDASPES

(POROS *and attendants discovered. A furious storm is raging.*)

(*Enter BRAHMAN.*)

BRAH. What news? They say the Greeks
attempt to cross.

POR. Aye, up the stream, just where the river
bends,

A sentry saw them struggling in the flood.

I sent the Prince to beat them down the bank;
They will not win against the tide and him.

BRAH. What troops went with the Prince to
meet them, Sire?

POR. A scanty force, but strong enough to
quell

This mad attempt. Who but a hare-brained
boy

Would risk the crossing, and on such a night?

(Enter a MESSENGER.)

MESSENGER. To arms! The Prince has fallen
and the Greeks,

Their army in array, are marching down.

POR. The Prince has fallen! Is our son then
dead?

MESSENGER. They reached the shore some
moments ere he came;

His force they overwhelmed, and him they
slew.

POR. Nay, then, to arms! Let each man fight
for king

And country, for his life, his home, his lands.

To arms! To arms! Ourself will lead the van.

(Enter a second MESSENGER.)

POR. Well, slave, thy news?

MESSENGER. The news is black, my Lord.

POR. It better fits the night. What is it?
Speak.

MESSENGER. The Rajah of Abhìsara has sent
To Alexander messengers of peace
And offered firm alliance 'gainst your state.

BRAH. The curse of all the gods be on his
head.

POR. How know you this?

MESSENGER. A captive Greek has told.

POR. Enough! This night will see a battle
fought

That shall surpass the glories of our Ind
And dim the deeds of all our storied chiefs.
We shall be sung of in the coming years,
And taught to children when their infant hands
First learn to draw the bow; our names shall be
Familiar to their ears as common words
For honour, courage, strength, and hardihood.
Yea, while we fight, the souls of heroes dead
Will turn them backward on the way to Brahm,

And think a moment of remembered fields
Not told of more than this shall ever be.
Attend me all: your king to conquest leads.

ALL. Lead on, lead on!

Curtain

SCENE IV

THE SAME AS SCENE II

(Yzdra is reclining on a couch; the Greek slave girl is in attendance.)

SLAVE. My Queen, I sing you now the last
sad song

That Sappho wrought in Lesbos, long ago.

Yz. Oh, sing it not! No rumour yet has come
Of how the battle goes. I cannot heed
Your minstrelsy when heart and ears and eyes
Are strained to meet his tardy messenger.

(She goes to the door and listens; then speaks mechanically and rather more to herself than to the slave.)

The King succeeded in his mad attempt
To cross the swollen river. Night and storm
But made it worse. He could not brook delay

But would lead on, though all the elements
Conspired with Poros darkly for his doom.

(Enter HEPHÆSTION fresh from the field.)

HEPH. The field is won and Alexander comes.

Yz. Oh gods, I give you thanks! But is he
safe?

Without a wound?

HEPH. Without a wound he comes.

We gained this day a greater victory

Than Issus or Arbela. Poros lives.

Yz. For that again I thank the holy gods.

HEPH. He fell into our hands with many
wounds.

The Rajah held aloof; the Prince was killed.

Yz. The slaughter lasted long?

HEPH. They would not yield

Until their leader sank beneath his wounds

And left the field; for while his strength held out

He led with wondrous valour, charge on charge.

Yz. I oft have heard him called a king indeed,

A man of noble bearing, strength and skill,
One born to rule, and not to know defeat.
Through what strange ways the gods work out
their will!

Not long ago I sought to serve the State,
And now I scarce can weep my country's doom,
My father's bondage and my brother's death;
So love has changed me from the thing I was.

(A confused shouting is heard. HEPHÆSTION goes to the door. Enter soldiers half carrying the BRAHMAN. He is very weak and his robes are stained and torn; but the moment he sees YZDRA he straightens up and stands supported by the soldiers. YZDRA looks at him, showing first defiance, then pity, followed, as he raises himself, by fear.)

BRAH. Oh thou, who workest thus thy country's doom,
Let horror seize thee and let darkness fall
Upon thy lustful eyes till love be turned
To loathing. Siva, Vishnu, Brahm, on you

I call to work the curse I speak, and change
This traitor to the thing she most abhors.
Let her in death find no forgetfulness,
But still remember through a thousand lives
Her crime, her scornèd name, her father's woe,
Her nation's bondage and my dying curse.
And let her burn with passion, evermore
Unsatisfied and seeking still the love
That made her traitorous to King and gods.
Let her in death —

(A paroxysm of pain comes to him; he pauses.)

Yz. Oh, spare me! Spare me more!

BRAH. Let her in death no respite gain, or peace;
And let her hear forevermore her name
A word of infamy in common mouths.

Yz. Oh, spare me! Spare me this!

(Enter ALEXANDER.)

(He has bathed and anointed himself since the battle. YZDRA springs to him for protection.)

Ah, Lover, King!

BRAH. Thee too I curse.

ALEX. Nay, curse thyself, for thou
Art author of thine own calamity.

BRAH. With cheek unblanched and bosom un-
defiled

I die, for I am guiltless. I alone
Gave heed to Siva's will, for Poros scorned
The gods, and she —

ALEX. She clove to love and honour.

BRAH. The gods have sent swift vengeance,
and the blow

Has glanced to me, who, innocent, now die
In their disaster whelmed. I stifle! Air!
My curse be on you both.

*(He falls to the floor. HEPHÆSTION goes over
and examines him to see if he is dead. YZDRA
stands hiding her face against ALEXANDER, who
has one arm about her supporting her.)*

ALEX. *(To the soldiers.)* Bear him away.
And do you leave us too, Hephæstion.

HEPH. I will, my Liege. Farewell.

ALEX. Live long, my friend.
You have my orders, let them be fulfilled.

(HEPHÆSTION goes out. YZDRA raises her head from ALEXANDER'S shoulder and holds him at arm's length. They look at each other in silence for a moment.)

ALEX. At last we are together, all the world
Shut out.

YZ. I have you with me, wholly mine.

ALEX. The Brahman's curse has made you
pale with fear.

YZ. I came into your arms and felt their
strength,
And then I did not heed him any more.
The wound he gave is healed, and now at last
I come to you, for I am wholly yours,
To do with what you wish.

ALEX. My love exceeds
The measure I had dreamed that love could fill.

Yz. From conquest come, you seem a god
indeed,

And I a lowly worshipper who waits
To pour the pure libation of my love
Upon your altar.

ALEX. Nay, 'tis you who seem
Divine in giving thus divinely all
Yourself.

Yz. 'Tis love that makes us what we are.

ALEX. You bow my heart in giving thus
yourself;

I kneel as though before some awful fane,
So pure, so dread, I dare not enter in,
And scarcely dare to look where burning white,
Beyond all mystery, Love sits enthroned.

Yz. I only have a woman's heart to give —
A simple thing and common, as it seems —
But you give up the world, world-wide renown,
And this, without the fruits of victory.

(ALEXANDER, *with profound pity in his eyes,*

Came back in sunsets. Will you feel me, Love,
Glow all about you when the west is bright
In after years? Now quickly come to me;
The night is very short and death ends all.

(He turns toward her and steps forward.)

Yz. If you should die I could no longer live.

(Alexander takes a scroll from his girdle.)

ALEX. I here have written out my last commands.

Hephæstion, who thinks not of my death,
Will come at dawn, and if I then be dead,
This shows what course to follow. You, my
Queen,

Have India for your realm, and with you stay
Some Greeks until the country owns your
rule.

No other way there is. Come quickly now;
We have so long delayed that love is pain.

Yz. The hour I sought has come at last too
soon.

(ALEXANDER *lays his dagger on a table. A shout is heard in the distance.*)

What noise is that?

ALEX. (*going to the door*) Some tumult in the camp.

The men are revelling; they do not guess
That I no more shall lead to victory.

(*The watch-fires are seen through the still open door. The sunset has now faded from the sky. He stands looking out toward the camp, and YZDRA watches him sadly. Then she looks down at the dagger, starts, and looks back at him.*)

They loved me well.

YZ. (*Her voice trembles a little.*)

And you, in turn, love them?

ALEX. They have been still my friends, and
they with me

Have much endured; but now I bid farewell
To friends and war and yield myself to love.

(*After a pause.*)

The men will miss me.

(Stretching out his arms toward the camp.)

Now farewell, farewell.

(YZDRA suddenly reaches her decision, seizes the dagger and stabs herself.)

YZ. Farewell, but not to them.

ALEX. What have you done?

YZ. The steel works swiftly.

(She falls.)

ALEX. Zeus! Where is the wound?

(He stoops over her, examining the wound.)

YZ. I die.

ALEX. If aught divine within me dwells,
Oh, Ammon, Father, now in sorest need,
Give aid unto thy son!

YZ. No help. I die,
But you shall live and win the golden East.

ALEX. I care no more for conquest; all is done.

YZ. Grieve not for me; I loved you far too well
To let you die.

ALEX. Go not, go not so soon!

Yz. I cannot stay; but you for love must
spare

My father and my nation.

ALEX. God! No help!

One kiss! I come with you.

Yz. (*Very wildly.*) Not that! Not that!

(ALEXANDER *throws himself down beside her*
and kisses her. After a pause he starts up.)

ALEX. There is no poison there!

Yz. Not there!

ALEX. Too late!

It may be that it was not there at all.

Yz. (*With intense bitterness.*) Oh God, too
late! too late!

(*Slowly the bitterness leaves her face and in its*
stead comes serenity, which in turn yields suddenly
to radiant joy.)

You will not die!

(*She dies. ALEXANDER bends over her for a*

moment, then rises to his full height, stretching out his arms toward the sky.)

ALEX. Past help of gods or men, Fate works
its will.

THE END



NOTE ON THE SOURCE OF "YZDRA"

The *Secreta Secretorum*, the book from which the story of Yzdra is taken, purports to have been written by Aristotle in his old age as a manual of guidance for his pupil Alexander, and contains much curious advice on almost every subject: how to judge a man's character by the shape of his nose; in what position of the heavens it is advisable to take physic; how a king should comport himself under all circumstances; etc. The advice is given in the greatest detail and the volume is almost an encyclopædia of ancient scientific and magical knowledge.

At the opening is a letter from Alexander, requesting Aristotle's advice, and then follows the answer in which the philosopher says that, as he is too old to accompany Alexander in his course of conquest, he will write down for him a summary of all his knowledge, but, lest the treatise should come into profane hands, he writes it as a mystery, to which Alexander alone shall have the key. The inference in the story of the poisoned maiden that Aristotle was with Alexander in India, is not only false in itself, but contrary to the general statement of the book.

The probability as to its origin is that sometime in the eighth century a Syrian Christian physician collected the materials from Greek and other sources, and, realising in a quite up-to-date manner the obvious advantages of passing off his book as a translation of a lost work of Aristotle's, gave it this form. The actual composition seems to have been in the Syriac language, called in the text "Chalden." At a later date, the author himself probably translated his work into Arabic, and presented it with a sort of dedicatory prologue to some Mahomedan ruler.

About the year 1140, a renegade Jewish physician of Spain found part of the Arabic text and put it into Latin, but the complete Arabic text does not seem to have been translated until a French clerk found a copy at Antioch in the latter part of the twelfth, or early in the thirteenth century. This he translated into Latin by the order of a French bishop of Tripoli, and his version quickly spread through Europe. It was translated into most of the vulgar tongues, copied from manuscript to manuscript, commented upon in perfect good faith, or imitated by many of the distinguished scholars of the time, and finally the invention of printing still more widely disseminated it. Editions were still being made in the eighteenth century. While the great vogue of the book during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was caused chiefly by the prestige of Aristotle's name, it is likely that its popularity was partly due to the fact that it could be regarded as a portion of the Alexander cycle of romances, then as widely known as the Charlemagne or Arthurian cycles. Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon, Michael Scot and Albertus Magnus all either commented upon the book or wrote something in a similar form, but perhaps its most notable literary offspring is *The Prince* of Machiavelli. Finally, having done its work, it died; but the story of the poisoned maiden, here called Yzdra, seems to have sunk into the mind of the race, and will perhaps be told now and again until the end of time.

This story was apparently first related apart from its context, and with variations, in the *Gesta Romanorum*, where the old monks treated it as an allegory in which Man (Alexander) was saved by the workings of the Holy Ghost (Aristotle's wisdom) from the world, the flesh, and the devil. It would be interesting if some one, who cared more for symbolism and psychology than for romance, would use the legend and interpret its latent allegory in a modern way, making the poison work a slow degeneration of the spirit.

From some one of the early versions the story was taken by Sir Thomas Browne, who says that the poison was aconite,

and by Burton, who in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* stated that the maiden was sent by Poros, giving falsely as his authority Q. Curtius. She is usually known simply as the daughter of the King or Queen of India and sometimes as the daughter of the Queen of the South. No trace of it appears in English literature, so far as I know, from the days of Browne until the New England writers took it up. It is quoted from the French alchemist, Mizaldus, in *Elsie Venner*, the central idea of which is identical with that version of the story given in the *Gesta Romanorum*; and quite possibly Hawthorne, who tells it in *Rappaccini's Daughter*, developed the idea of his somewhat similar tale from the legend here put into dramatic form, but hitherto — through twelve hundred years or more — told only in passing. It is a pity that Marlowe or Webster did not find it.

That version of the story quoted at the beginning of the present volume is as circumstantial as any except the altered one in the *Gesta Romanorum*.

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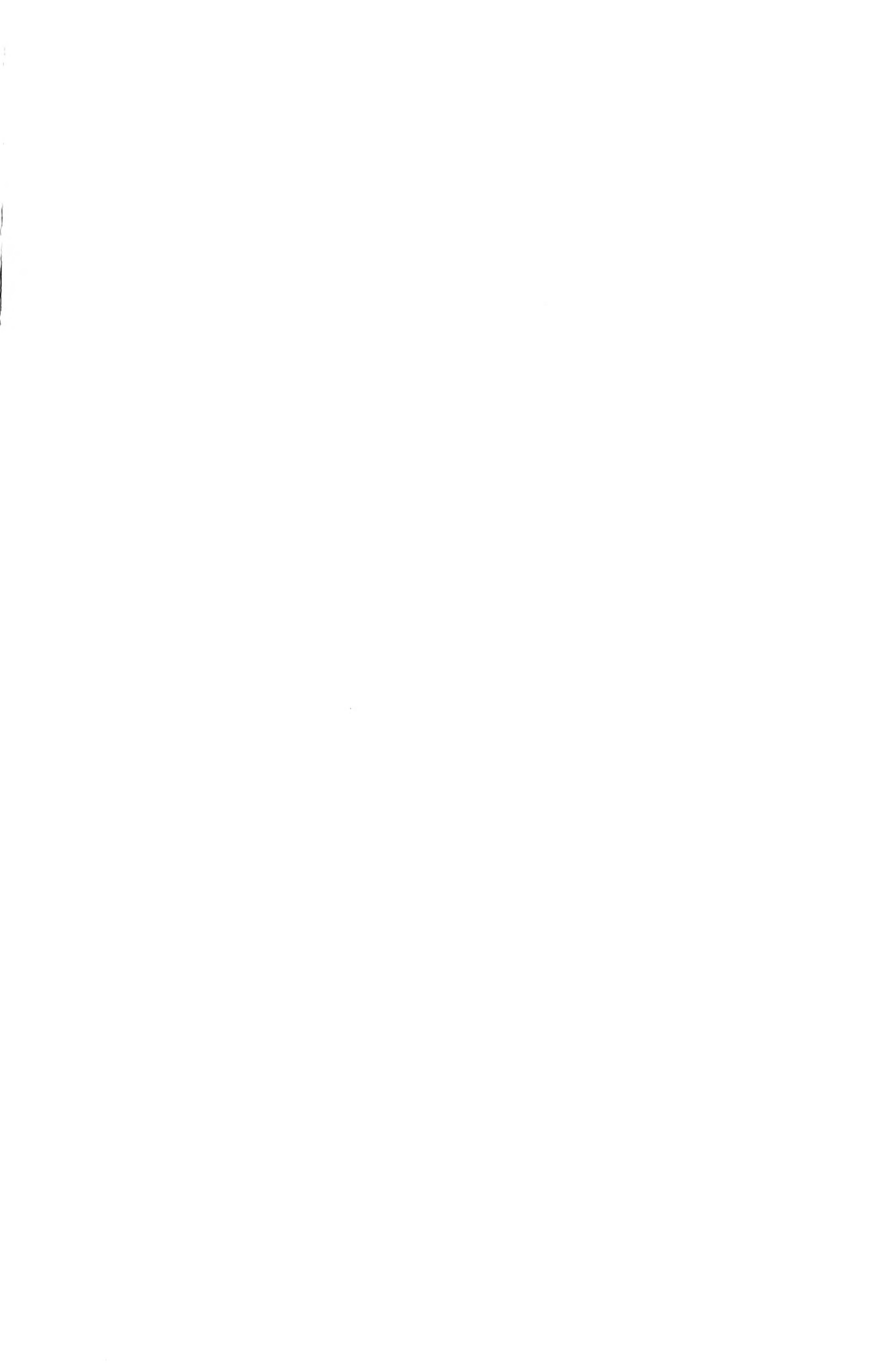
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